

Escape Costs Ray 1 to 2 Years, Tacked on to Current Prison Term

WARTBURG, Tenn. (AP) — James Earl Ray, serving a 99-year term for the killing of Martin Luther King Jr., has been found guilty of escape and sentenced to an additional one to two years in prison.

The sentence, determined by the jury, was the minimum allowable under state law. Ray's attorneys had asked the jury, if it found Ray guilty, to impose a sentence of one day, "to send a message to Washington."

Ray had testified earlier yesterday that he escaped in an effort to win a new trial for the 1968 slaying of King, to which he originally pleaded guilty.

Jury foreman Bradford Pitch read the verdict and sentence after two hours and 55 minutes of deliberation. Ray sat expressionless.

Before yesterday's conviction, Ray, 49, would have been eligible for parole in 1998.

The six other inmates who scaled the rear wall of the prison on June 10 and fled into the mountainous woods surrounding the fortress were earlier sentenced to one year in exchange for their guilty pleas.

Ray's attorneys, Mark Lane and George Buxton III, said they were happy with the trial and would begin to work on getting a new trial for Ray on the murder charge.

Criminal Court Judge Lee Asbury also allowed Ray's attorneys 25 days to file motions for a new trial on the escape charge.